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THREE
DIALOGUES
CONCERNING
LIBERTY.

THREE

DIALOGUES

CONCERNING

LIBERTY.

Lewis, Thomas

Libertatem, quam in me requiris, quam ego
neque dimisi unquam, neque dimittam, non
in pertinacia, sed in quadam moderatione
positam putabo.

CICERO, Oratio pro CN. PANCIO.

L O N D O N :

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T H R E E
D I A L O G U E S
C O N C E R N I N G
L I B E R T Y.

D I A L O G U E I.

TWO winters have passed, since
a friend, of a studious turn of
mind, and fond of retirement, was
prevailed on, reluctantly, to pass a
few of the winter weeks with me in
town.—As, with a very good un-
derstanding, he hath acquired a calm-
ness of mind, which enables him to
judge of things with great accuracy
and disinterestedness, I was frequently
delighted, by hearing his opinions of
B those

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those political disputes, which take up so much of the time and thoughts of the good people of this great city.

He would say, it was surprizing to see so great a number of people as he met with every where, so warm and so agitated about a subject, of which if they were not intirely ignorant, they had certainly given themselves very little trouble to examine into the nature of.—He meant the subject of Liberty.

I thought it but fair, that he who laughed at the absurdity and ignorance of others, should produce his own opinions on the same subject. I therefore drew him, one evening when we were left together without other company, insensibly to the point I intended, and urged him to give me his thoughts on the subject of Liberty,
the

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the nature of which, I said, I had never very nicely considered. — He hesitated a moment, and said, he knew I was not one of those, who enquire through an impertinent curiosity, or who argue to gain a victory; he would therefore freely give his opinion on the subject, provided, I would not fail to interrogate him, when he should not sufficiently explain himself; and would not let any thing pass unexamined, which I might think wrong or not sufficiently clear. — I promised, and he began as follows.

Liberty is a word, taken as it is vulgarly used, of a very indeterminate signification, and, like many others of the moral kind, very few people have, *even nearly*, the same ideas affixed to it. — But it doth not from thence fol-

B 2 low,

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low, that it, as well as others of the same kind, is incapable of definition; but that more care is required to trace out and place it in its true point of view.——Here he stopped.——

I begged he would proceed; for that I knew of none more likely than himself to place it in its true point of view.——The doubt of that, he said, was the thing which made him pause; for the research must be deep into the natural constitution of man. Yet he thought the subject much more simple than was commonly imagined; and that the intricacies and uncertainties, which some could fancy themselves able to discover in such subjects, arose more from prejudice and perversity, than from the nature of the things.

He said, it appeared to him, that
the

DIALOGUE I. 5

the liberty or freedom of man, in an abstracted sense, consisted in a power of doing, or of forbearing to do, any action, at his pleasure.—If there were any impediment, either to his doing, or not doing any action, he was in such case not free ; he was confined on the one side, or on the other.—I assented.—It may seem trifling, continued he, to say, that man hath not a freedom of choice in things superior to his nature ; and that God hath set bounds to the powers of human nature which cannot be exceeded : yet it appears requisite to say so much, because, you know, there have not been wanting many instances of men, whose memories have failed them in that particular.—True, said I, as Alexander

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when he fancied himself a God,—
Aye, said he, and as every one who
fancies himself endued with faculties
or powers, which are either above or
below human nature; and they doubt-
less have been, and are numerous.

But, added he, the all-wise Creator
hath thought fit to circumscribe the
powers of Man, and he can act only
within a certain sphere: within that
sphere the utmost freedom of human
actions is necessarily confined: beyond
it man can do nothing.—He looked
at me.—True, said I; But may a
man, then, do all that he hath power
to do, within the circumscribed line?
May every capricious fancy be in-
dulged? or are there reasons, why
Liberty so extensive should suffer re-
straint?—There are, answered he,
very

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very substantial reasons to be given, why the Liberty of man should be restrained within narrower bounds.— But how narrow are those bounds ? interrogated I, somewhat sharply ; and what should move him to contain himself within them ? —It was difficult, he said, 'to draw precisely the line which ought not to be passed, *in all cases*, perhaps almost impossible : yet he thought he could do it well enough to satisfy the mind of any rational man.—I smiled, begged he would go on, and leave the minds of irrational men dissatisfied,——He proceeded thus.

All creatures, every one according to his kind or species, are created subject to laws, proper and peculiar to their several natures, and suitable

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to the ends of the Supreme Being,
——True, said I.——The creature
man too, continued he, is created sub-
ject to laws equally proper and pecu-
liar to his nature: and the Deity hath
not only made him sensibly to feel
them, but hath enabled him to un-
derstand their reasonableness, and to
perceive their beauty and excellence:
and in this understanding and percep-
tion consists the great difference be-
tween man and other creatures. *They*,
while left to themselves, seem to be
guided by an unerring instinct; but
we are allowed a larger field, and are
capable of *a certain degree* of resistance
to *the true and natural impulses or laws*
of our nature; which God appears to
have allowed to man, that he might
not be incapable of merit; the merit

DIALOGUE I. 9

of freely choofing to obey thofe true and natural impulses, by which God doth point out his will in the foul of man.—I think, faid I, I perfectly agree with you; only I do not well underftand what you mean, when you fay, “we are capable of *a certain degree* “ of refiftance to the true and natural “ impulses or laws of our nature.”

—I mean, answered he, that we can refift and act contrary to thofe impulses, which would move us to conduct ourfelves agreeably to our own true happinefs, and to the general good of our kind: but that we can only refift to *a certain degree*; fufficient indeed to torment ourfelves and others, and one would think, therefore, fufficient to convince us of our errors: yet the utmoft force of human difobedience

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dience and perversity is, doubtless, too weak and too much circumscribed, to be able to bring about a general destruction of our kind ; and surely much too insignificant, to disturb the general order and harmony of the universal system.—It should seem then, replied I, (since our power of resistance extends only to the tormenting of ourselves and others) agreeable to the true happiness of individuals, and to the good of all, not to resist, but to obey, those true and natural impulses or laws you speak of.—Doubtless, rejoined he ; and because the true happiness, and the true good of all, and of every individual, require obedience to those laws ; therefore the greatest liberty of man ought to be restrained within narrower bounds :
within

DIALOGUE I. 11

within bounds which those laws would prescribe.

I am convinced, said I, that our greatest liberty, or freedom of action, ought not to be exercised in its fullest extent ; and it must be acknowledged, that restraints are necessary : but what those restraints ought to be, and how far they ought to extend, are points about which mankind seem to be very far from entertaining the same sentiments. — 'Tis true, answered he, men do seem to differ widely about those things ; but their differences do not arise so much from any natural difficulty in the subject, as from the prepossession of established prejudices : such as false religions, unnatural customs, misguided passions, and mercenary contentions. — Surrounded by
such

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such dark clouds, ignes fatui for their guides, leading various and contrary ways ; it is not very surprizing that the minds of men do not agree concerning a matter, which can only be understood by looking closely into themselves, and observing there those laws which God hath impressed on the soul of man.—But, to the truth of a proposition, or the existence of a thing, the universal consent of mankind is not *always* necessary.—However, I do not find that men differ much in material points, when they can so far conquer their prejudices as to compare notes with a moderate share of patience : nor, indeed, is it possible they should, since God hath given the same laws to all human nature.—It seems, replied I, you think

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think those prejudices you speak of (and which, doubtless, do very strongly influence the minds of many) have cast obscurities around nature, through which she is not easily discerned; but could we divest ourselves of those prejudices, we should discover much more simplicity in the laws imposed on human nature than is commonly imagined? — It is just what I think, answered he. — I believe you were going to explain some of those laws when I interrupted you? said I. —

I was endeavouring to collect my thoughts for that purpose, answered he: and I think we had agreed that our greatest liberty ought to be restrained within bounds, which the true laws of our nature would prescribe; because the true happiness
and

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and good of all required such restraint ?

——I answered, we had : and now I

want to know what those laws are,

which may be deemed just restraints

on our more extensive liberty ; and

which it is the true happiness of all

to submit to.——I will endeavour to

satisfy you, said he, as well as I can :

to do which it will be necessary to

take the matter somewhat deeply, as

I said before, and to carry our re-

searches to the fundamental principles

of human nature : yet I do not mean

to enter into all the minute distinc-

tions of some refined moral writers,

not only because they would be unne-

cessary to our present purpose, but

because I know you are not unac-

quainted with them.——I looked

consent, and he went on as follows.

DIALOGUE I. 15

It having been ordained by the Great Creator, that the continuation of the human kind should be preserved by generation ; and that we should ascend from the lowest degrees of weakness and ignorance, by a very slow and gradual progression, to corporeal strength and a reasonable mind; he hath accordingly endued us with affections and passions (or laws) suitable and subservient to these ends.

— Certainly. — The passion between the sexes, and the consequent affection toward the offspring, and all the other affections which take their rise from family, have their foundations in human nature, and are evidently intended to continue the being of the kind, and to secure the nurture and support of those, who

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who would be unable to nourish and support themselves.—True, said I.

—And do not these laws, interrogated he, act upon us with an almost invincible force; as, indeed, the importance of their end, and the great difficulties in the progress to that end, require they should? — They do indeed, answered I; for nothing seems so much to agitate the human frame, as the sense we have of these laws: nothing throws us into so great irregularities as the violation of them. They are the great sources, from whence we derive all that is pathetic, all that is most affecting and most interesting to human nature.—

Then, said he, I may infer, that you will not dispute the authority, which all those tender affinities of husband
and

DIALOGUE I. 17

and wife, of parent and child, of brother and sister, and other more distant relatives, ought to have over our conduct?—By all means, replied I.——So that all the moral obligations, continued he, which must naturally arise from those tender affinities, we may justly call *laws*; which the being of our kind, and the concord and stability of families, require that men should submit to?—I think so, answered I.——May we not conclude then, demanded he, that the liberty of man ought to suffer such restraints as *these laws* would put on it; and that he can have no just pretence to exercise any liberty contrary to these laws?—Doubtless, answered I.——Here then, said he, we see arise many restraints on liberty, which moralists

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have

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have particularized, and which are so easy to understand, that few can be ignorant of them. But these are not all; there are many more, which, in a general way, I will endeavour to point out.—I desired him to go on.—All those kind propensities, continued he, which are commonly understood by the words, humanity, generosity, benevolence, &c. why may we not call them *true and natural laws* of our nature?—I see no objection, said I.—In contradistinction, continued he, to inhumanity, selfishness, and malevolence, which are rightly called *unnatural*, as having tendencies contrary and inimical to human nature?

The Deity hath so strongly impressed them on the soul of man, and so clearly distinguished

DIALOGUE I. 19

distinguished them as the true guides of human actions, by the pleasure they yield to the practiser, the love and admiration they draw from men, and the great utility of such virtues to the world, that the man's mind must be strangely perverted from its natural bent, who is not sensible of such laws in his soul. For though bad customs, bad education, and unnatural manners, may very much deface the original impressions which God hath stamped on the human soul; yet those impressions can never be entirely destroyed, as long as man continues subject to the present state of humanity.—Indeed, I think so, said I.—We can indeed, continued he, render ourselves insensible of a thousand more refined and pleasing emo-

tions of the foul; but not without exchanging them for painful ones. For nature seems constant in this precept; *Obey my laws, they lead to pleasure, or suffer the pains of disobedience.* It is impossible to extirpate them; it is impossible to oppose them without pain; it is impossible to be indifferent. They are a principal part of our nature, and nothing can destroy their force, but death.—I cannot dissent from you, said I.—It will then, said he, be unnecessary to our present purpose, to moralize more particularly. And we may be permitted to make this inference, — That, as obedience to these laws conduces to the good and felicity of every individual, and of mankind in general; and as disobedience has a contrary effect;

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it is but just and reasonable, that the liberty of man should suffer such restraints as may be necessary to prevent him from offending against them.——

I am of the same opinion, said I.——

Thus then, said he, we have, in a general way, drawn the outlines of those laws of the human nature, which it hath pleased the Creator to impose on it, for ends, which, we have agreed, are intirely for the advantage and felicity of the creature. Nor do we deem it unjust to restrain the liberty of man, when he would transgress these laws. —— True, said I: But who shall restrain his liberty? who shall enforce obedience? Why may he not trample on the laws of his nature, and suffer *the pains of disobedience*, without being compelled to

C 3 obey;

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obey ; since nature, it seems, only points out felicity in obedience, and misery in disobedience, but leaves man to choose?—Your question, replied he, would be unanswerable, if there were but one man on the earth at a time ; or if men were so situated, that they had not the least necessary connection or commerce with each other. But the fact being quite contrary, as we have seen in the preceding part of our discourse, and men being, by the very nature of their existence, necessarily interested in, and connected with one another, they thereby acquire a just right to controul the actions of each other ; so far, at least, as to prevent injury to themselves. But the principal foundation of right in men to enforce obedience

obedience on each other, to the true laws of their nature, is derived from their *natural equality*.—How! interrogated I, do you, then, maintain that levelling principle, that men are naturally equal, when there are natural inequalities among them so very manifest?—I do, answered he: but I fancy the ideas, which you and I have affixed to the word *equality*, in this instance, are very different. What mine are, with your permission, I will endeavour to explain in as few words as possible.—I begged he would; and he proceeded thus,

All creatures of the same kind are created under laws peculiar to their kind. All men are of the same kind, and are doubtless created under laws peculiar to *their* kind: and in this

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respect it is that all men are certainly equal.—So it appears to me, said I, But are the great differences in the faculties and abilities of men no objection against this equality?—Not at all, answered he. The possession of great bodily strength, for instance, gives a man no just title to use that strength mischievously, and against the laws of humanity: he may possess some of, or all, the faculties of the body in greater perfection than other men; but these faculties are given him subjected to the same natural laws which are common to all men: nor can he by superior force transgress the laws common to his kind by nature, without injustice. He may bear greater burdens, run swifter, shew more agility in action, &c. and all the superior advantages

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advantages resulting from these faculties *justly used*, he hath a right to, but no other. — Your reasoning seems just, said I: But what say you to superior mental powers? Have they no better claim than those of the body? — In this case, answered he, they appear to me to have less. Superior understanding, far from allowing a man to dispense with the laws of human nature, more strictly binds him to a nice observance of them. He is unpardonable, if he do no more than common men in practising and promoting a due obedience to them. Great genius enables him to be more thoroughly convinced of the truth and justice of these laws. He perceives more, understands more, than inferior minds: Can we, from thence, infer,
he

he hath a right to transgress these laws, which the inferior hath not ? or, if the inferior transgress, is he not more pardonable than the superior genius, for that very reason, because he is inferior ?

——I cannot but confess it, said I?——

No man, then, continued he, possessing any quality or property of the human nature in a superior degree, can from thence, with the least shew of reason, suppose himself not justly bound by the same laws of his nature, by which all men are bound : for all degrees of human qualities or properties, from the least to the greatest without exception, are incontestably given by God, under the very same natural laws, which are common to the human kind. And until a man demonstrate, that he is created under laws peculiar

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peculiar to himself, and not those known and felt by other men, (which, by the way, would be to prove himself not a man, but some other creature) there cannot be the least reason to suppose him exempted from subjection to those laws, which are common to the human nature. — By no means, said I. — We have, then, said he, not only discovered, that the liberty of man ought to be restrained by the laws peculiar to his nature; but that all men are by nature equally subjected to these laws. — So it seems, returned I.

I will, continued he, with your leave, say somewhat more of the nature and effects of this equality. — I am all attention, said I. —

He

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He proceeded thus. If a man offend, in such a manner, against the laws of human nature, that the ill effects be *absolutely* confined to his own person, (which is, strictly speaking, hardly possible) and be no way detrimental to others ; he does not seem to be accountable to any, but to God and himself. But, for the least transgression, which injures, or tends to injure, his equals and fellow-creatures, he is accountable to them, as well as to his Maker. Men, being injured, or having *just* cause to fear injury, and *being equal*, have *therefore* an indisputable right to use all reasonable means of prevention and correction ; regulating their conduct by the laws of their nature ; since, otherwise, that
just

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just equality of the human kind could never be, in any tolerable degree, preserved.

Nor can it be conceived, by what right, any man, or number of men, could correct the wrong or unjust actions of another, if this natural equality had no existence: Every one would have reason to think he might do any thing he could do, without regard to others; as containing in himself specific qualities, which made the laws of his nature peculiar to himself, and not the same as those which are common to all men. But as no man is a species of himself, but only a part of a species, he cannot have laws peculiar to himself; but must be subjected to those, which are common to all of his species. It will not be understood,

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stood, continued he, that equality in point of property is intended; for that is not only impossible in the natural course of things, but neither reasonable or just. The laws of our nature are not at all infringed, by a *just use* of the advantages, which superior wisdom, or superior industry, gives one man over another: On the contrary, it would be great injustice, and great discouragement to all merit, to take from them those advantages and emoluments, which they may naturally acquire *without breach of the laws of the human nature.*——Here he paused, seeming to expect some reply.——I am glad, said I, to find myself, by your last observations, relieved from the dread I had of the levelling principles, which at first I thought would
have

species, by which his judgments should be regulated. So that every species of creatures, acting conformably to the laws of its nature, although it may be injurious to other species, is not deemed unjust on that account. No man, for instance, complains of injustice on account of any injurious actions done against himself by beings which he does not believe to be subjected to those natural laws, which men are subjected to. If a lion devour a man, he is not understood to be unjust ; we suppose the creature to act only in conformity to the laws of his nature. If inundations destroy, the sun burn, the frost chill, or the winds carry away, no injustice is attributed to these elements ; nor could be, supposing them to be intelligent

D beings,

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appeal to justice, is nothing but an appeal to those natural laws, by which the just equality of mankind is to be preserved ; and the self-partiality of parties concerned requires, that the determination should be left to uninterested judges.——The notion of justice hath no existence, where an equality in nature is not understood.——Take away that equality in nature (as among creatures of different species) and justice is no more seen, nor the claim of justice heard. The superior species (if capable of reason) may exhibit benevolence, but justice is quite out of the question. Nor can a creature of one species, administer justice to creatures of a different species ; because he cannot be sufficiently sensible of the laws of a different species,

species, by which his judgments should be regulated. So that every species of creatures, acting conformably to the laws of its nature, although it may be injurious to other species, is not deemed unjust on that account. No man, for instance, complains of injustice on account of any injurious actions done against himself by beings which he does not believe to be subjected to those natural laws, which men are subjected to. If a lion devour a man, he is not understood to be unjust; we suppose the creature to act only in conformity to the laws of his nature. If inundations destroy, the sun burn, the frost chill, or the winds carry away, no injustice is attributed to these elements; nor could be, supposing them to be intelligent

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beings,

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beings, *actuated by the true laws of their natures*, any more than to the lion, who was actuated by the laws of his nature. Nor do we conceive, that, in the uses we make of other creatures, so far at least as our nature seems to require, we do them any injustice. Justice or injustice, then, do not appear to be concerned in the actions of superior natures, acting according to their true laws, on inferior natures, or vice versa.—I think, I am convinced, said I; only I fear the attribute of justice, which we give to the Deity, may be called in question, by what you say of the incapacity of a superior species to exercise justice over an inferior: may it not? — Not at all, answered he; for the Deity bears no similitude to created beings,
in

in that respect. He is the Creator of all beings, and of the laws of all beings; and must therefore be, without controversy, a most perfect judge of the laws, and of the nature, of all the creatures in the universe; which cannot be said of any created beings.

—Your answer, said I, seems satisfactory; yet now another doubt arises. You have said, “The notion of justice hath no existence, where an equality in nature is not understood.” Now, what equality in nature is there between God and man? or doth not the notion of justice exist between them?

—This difficulty, answered he, is not so great as at first it may appear. The equality, which is the foundation of justice between God and man, is not to be sought for in the nature of

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God and the nature of man; for there the difference is infinite, and beyond all comprehension: but it is to be sought for, and will be found, in the laws which God has given to human nature, and the powers and faculties of man; which he has so nicely and justly proportioned to each other, that perhaps there cannot in nature be found a more exact equality. Nor will it, I think, be disputed, that the Deity is so just in the laws he has given to every species of creatures, as to proportion the faculties of the creatures to their laws: and that more is not expected, than is adequate to the faculties any creature may possess. Thus we see, that the laws of human nature, which are *equally* binding on all men, are not only the rule or measure
of

of justice between man and man ; but these same laws are also the rule, which the God of all wisdom hath been pleased to ordain between man and Himself. — Your reasoning seems just, said I. But what do you say to a state of future retribution ? — I say, answered he, (in few words) that, if it shall be found, that men be not sufficiently rewarded by the pleasures of obedience, nor enough punished by the pains of disobedience, in this life ; there can be no doubt, but that in some future existence, perfect justice will take place: for the Supreme Judge is almighty, and of unerring wisdom, and infinite goodness. — You must be right, said I. — We will therefore conclude, if you please, continued he, that from the equality of mankind,

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that is, from the equal subjection of all men to the same laws of their nature, they derive a right equally to exact obedience of one another : and that in the practice of *a perfectly equal* obedience, the idea of *perfect justice* consists ; and in the enforcing of equal obedience, the exercise of justice consists. I will only add one observation more on this head, which is, that had the human species, like other animals, been governed by an instinct, which would have kept them true to their natural laws, justice had never been heard of among men.—Well then, said I, supposing us to be agreed in this point ?—Why then, answered he, we have agreed in all points thus far.—And, I think, from what has been said, we may be able to draw,
with

with some degree of precision, the line by which the liberty of human actions ought to be circumscribed.

First, No man can *justly* violate or transgress those laws, which are necessary to the propagation, continuation, and support of our species, *with the greatest advantage possible.*

Secondly, No man can *justly* violate the laws of humanity, or all those propensities, which would prompt us to a benevolent, humane, and reasonable treatment of each other.

Thirdly, No man can *justly* transgress those bounds, which justice, regulated by the laws of human nature, doth determine to be the true measures of the rights of mankind, to the possession of property of any sort whatsoever.

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Fourthly,

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Fourthly, and lastly, That the nearer men approach to a perfect obedience of all, to all those laws, the nearer they will approach to that *just natural equality*, and that *just liberty*, which would result from the equal subjection of all men to the same natural laws : and that the idea of perfect human liberty is a perfect and exact obedience of all, to all those laws.—So it appears to me, said I.—And so, replied he, (rising to go to rest) we find nature is no less an enemy to *licentiousness*, than she is to *tyranny*.——And thus ended our first conversation.

DIALOGUE

D I A L O G U E II.

THE next evening, being left rather early by some company who had spent the day with us, we drew our chairs toward the fire-side. After some light conversation, I took an opportunity, on the mention of something political, to introduce a few observations on the subject of the preceding evening; which produced nearly what follows.

Some things, said I, which all writers on political subjects, speak very much of, were by us unnoticed yesterday evening: Such as, *the state of nature, the rise of civil government, a compact, religion,*

religion, &c. in all which things, the liberty of mankind is thought to be very much concerned, and, doubtless, with abundant reason. May I demand some explanation concerning these things ?——By all means, answered he ; I shall be very glad to oblige you, with any thing in my power. ——After a short pause, he said, you well know, how much has been said and written on these subjects by very able men ; for which reason you will not expect me to say a great deal. And I shall esteem myself fortunate, if, by pursuing the simplicity of my former reasoning, I may happily strike out something new in these matters ; or render, what in them has been made difficult and tedious, more obvious and less tiresome.——I think then, continued

nued he, a tolerable notion of *the state of nature* may be formed, from what has already been said in our first conversation ; for in that was contained a description of *the state of nature* in its earliest period : And you know, that writers usually chuse to distinguish the earliest period, as that, in which they conceive man to be in *the state of nature*.

As for those, who are so very curious in their researches, concerning *the state of nature*, as to consider man as a being abstracted from society, and naturally unsociable ; as an individual totally unconnected with his fellow-creatures, we may leave them to the enjoyment of their own speculations ; which, notwithstanding the discovery of a * *wild boy or two*, are entirely

* Peter.

vain

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vain and chimerical ; because men never have, *naturally*, existed in such a state at any time whatever. — I nodded assent.

When, continued he, we discourse of men, as being in *the state of nature*, to distinguish their manner of existence, before their entering into any formal government ; it is a phrase, which may serve very well for that purpose : But if we conceive, (and it is generally so conceived) that as soon as men submit themselves to government, they are no longer *in their natural state*, it is a very great mistake.— It is true, they have varied the state they were in, before their submission to government, but that variation does not induce an annihilation of the laws of nature ; or, in other words, it does
not

not make void *the state of nature*, considered as a state, in which men lived obedient to the true laws of nature, not enforced by political government : It is the injurious part of *the state of nature*, (which arises from the want of some certain and sufficient power, to enforce an equal and due obedience to the laws of nature) that men mean to get rid of, by submission to political government.—All the other parts of *the state of nature*, they mean to preserve by that very submission.—So that when men enter into political government (if upon right principles) they are as much in *the state of nature*, as they were before they entered, with this difference only ; that by the force of *a good government*, the laws of their nature will be preserved in much greater

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greater purity, than they could be in the state of nature for the want of that force.—So much for *the state of nature*, considered in this particular light.

But for my part, I cannot but think it a very unphilosophical distinction, to suppose men to be *out of a state of nature*, when they submit themselves to government ; or indeed ever to suppose them to be out of their natural state at all, *unless when they violate the true laws of their nature* ; and that we know they frequently do, under government, as well as before their submission to government.

Now if the violation of the true laws of human nature, do (as being an anti-natural thing) put men into an *unnatural state* ; and if to correct and reform such violations, be to reduce

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men to their *natural state* again ; and if that can only be effectually done by the help of *good* government, must we not conclude, that the true end of government is to keep men in their natural state ? And that men, under such government, are really much more in a natural state than they were, when under no government at all ?——Your reasoning seems just, answered I.

It has ever appeared strange to me, continued he, to hear men talk of man, as being *in the state of nature*, or *not in the state of nature*, in the sense usually affixed to these phrases. Much ambiguity would have been avoided, if the words, “ Man *in his natural state*, or *not in his natural state*,” had been employed.——When any other
species

species of animals is made a subject of enquiry, we always treat of it, as being in its *natural state*. And we very justly determine that to be *the natural state* of any species of creatures, which is found to be consonant to the true laws of its nature : and as far as the motives or actions of any creature, be dissonant to the same laws (by whatever means such dissonance arise) so far must they be deemed unnatural, and the creature out of his natural state.—Now were we to make man a subject of enquiry on the same ground, I apprehend much perplexity would be avoided ; and we should be much more likely to understand his *true natural state*.—But, interrogated I, would you have us to treat of man, as we do of other animals, whose

whose nature and faculties are so widely different? — Why not? answered he: Are not the nature and faculties of every species of creatures widely different? Yet we find an analogy in their natures, and treat of them all in nearly the same method. But what I have to say, continued he, will be short and general; nothing to the disadvantage of man, and perhaps something satisfactory to you.

Suppose, then, we lay it down as a maxim, that man, like other animals, is always in his *natural state*, when his motives and actions are consonant to the true laws of his nature; and vice versa. — I see no objection, said I. — If that be allowed, replied he, then, whether we consider him in the most savage and uncultivated state, or

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in the most refined and polished, or in any state between the two, we shall always find him in his *natural state*, when his conduct is conformable to the true laws of his nature.—It seems so, said I.—And his conduct, I presume, said he, will be so found, more generally under *good* government, than in any other period of his progress.—It is probable, said I. —But we are so used, added he, to consider the rudest state of our existence, as more truly our natural state, that, I fear, I shall with some difficulty find credit for a different opinion. But let us endeavour at a farther explanation, said he. Man in his rudest state bears a nearer resemblance to other animals; other animals, we allow, are kept in their
natural

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natural state by laws which act *instinctively* upon them, and partake but very little, if at all, of the rational faculty : so that we think ourselves certain, that they are true to the laws of their nature : and thus making them a measure for man, we suppose him to be more truly in his *natural state*, the nearer he approaches to the condition of other animals : and that may be true, as far as concerns his animal functions *merely*. But it ought to be considered, that the peculiar and distinguishing faculties of the human mind, which seem to infer a power of judging of the propriety of human actions, and a power of chusing or refusing to obey the dictates of nature, make a very considerable difference between the nature of man and of

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other creatures, and prove him to be intended for another and a much higher sphere of action. I see no cause therefore to conclude, that the rudest and least cultivated is more properly the natural state of man, on account of its approximation to the condition of brutes; but rather the contrary. There is no doubt indeed, as I said before, that man, in the animal or instinctive part of his nature, hath a great similarity to other creatures: but to pass away a life in the exercise of the animal faculties only, would hardly be deemed natural in a human creature: yet such nearly is the savage state. Now what other conclusion can be justly drawn from all this, but that man in a savage or uncultivated state is *in the lowest and least*

least improved state of human nature ; and in that which approaches the nearest to the brute creation ?——No other, I think, answered I.——It is, no doubt, continued he, the proper place to commence at, in the history of human nature ; and that is the only use that ought to have been made of it. But to suppose men to be *out of their natural state*, as soon as they begin to form plans of government, and to invent the useful and ornamental arts of life, is as irrational as to suppose ants out of their natural state, when they store up their hoards against winter ; or bees, when they construct combs for their honey.

A creature formed as man is, with such faculties, senses, and mental powers, is *by nature* moved, according as

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particular circumstances arise, to form and to submit himself to political institutions ; and to invent and cultivate arts useful and ornamental to life, and necessary to his well-being. This indeed is done in a progressive way, from a state of barbarity to a state of refinement and elegance. He seldom continues long in any certain state. Sometimes his progress in improvement is quick, sometimes very slow, because it much depends on favourable circumstances, and on the auspicious situation of things. In the least cultivated, or savage period of his existence, he is a very necessitous creature, and his time and faculties must be almost intirely engrossed in providing for such wants as are too pressing to be neglected. In such a state he can
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have but little leisure for contemplation and reflection; and from the rudeness of things about him, his ideas must be few, and his views short and confined. In his progress toward a more improved state, his urgent wants becoming more easily provided for, and finding more time for the exercise of his mind, he proceeds on, step by step, to the discovery of all the arts and sciences subservient either to the utility or the ornament of life, until at length he arrive at the most refined and polished state; from which it has been the usual course of things to decline again into barbarity. Now, were we inclined to determine upon any one period in this progress, as being more properly the *natural state* of man than any other, where must

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we fix?——To say particularly seems difficult, answered I.——Must it not be just at that period, interrogated he, when his conduct is most conformable to the true laws of his nature?——It must, answered I.——Perhaps, continued he, that may not be in the most refined state; and I think we are sure it is not in the most rude: but at whatever intermediate period it may be judged to exist, in all stages above or below that period, man will be more or less *in his natural state*, according as he approaches to, or recedes from, this conformity to the laws of his nature. And this is what I think, concerning *the natural state of man*. —— Remove one difficulty for me, said I, and we perfectly agree. Government, you know, is esteemed
a work

a work of *art*: now can men be said to live in their *natural state*, when their conduct is regulated by a work of *art*? — They may, answered he: for if we enquire into the just principles of *that work of art*, we shall find them to be the true laws of human nature, which ought to regulate, not only the actions of men, but the construction and conduct of *that work of art* itself. But you will be pleased to observe, added he, that it would be but of little moment here, to mark out precisely the line which separates the operations of instinctive nature from the works of human skill: because, in the case before us, the inquiry is concerning *the natural state of man*; which consisting, as we have agreed, in his obedience to the laws of his

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his nature, it matters not whether this obedience be effectuated by *instinctive nature* simply, (though we are pretty sure it is not) or by the force of *that* and art united. And here I must beg leave to take notice, continued he, that when the word *art* is used to signify something not founded in the *nature* of man, or as something that is not the *natural* result of the nature, constitution, and faculties of man, it certainly is misused.—Do you mean, demanded I, to say that art is natural to man? —I do, answered he.—But is not that a contradiction in terms? interrogated I.—It may appear so, according to the vulgar sense of those terms, replied he; but I believe it is no contradiction in the nature of things;

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things; for if it were, it certainly had never existed. It may be very proper on some occasions, continued he, to distinguish the operations of general or instinctive nature from the works of human skill: which, you know, has been done by Mr. Harris, as he does every thing, with admirable perspicuity, in his Treatise on Art. But, nevertheless, it is impossible to consider the wants and desires of man, and the nature, extent, and capacity of the human mind, and not to perceive that the *natural result* must be *art*.——So indeed it seems, said I.——*Art* must therefore, in this sense, be *natural* to man, concluded he.——On this head I am satisfied, replied I.

Well then, said he, I hope we shall not find so much difficulty in accounting

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counting for the origin of civil government : And he continued thus.

Opinions, you know, have been advanced concerning the first formation of political societies, no less extravagant than unnatural and contrary to probability : As if the rise of government, in the course of things, were not as *natural*, as the existence of the primary principles of human nature. Nay some * would make us believe, that such principles had no existence at all, till human laws were invented to give them one. And they find it very difficult to conceive, how men could associate, and form political societies, without a great deal of previous formality. But, if the principles of human nature have existed

* Locke.

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at all times, in all men, (and to believe otherwise must surely be very unphilosophical,) is it not easy to perceive, that the passion which impels us to the propagation of our species, together with its consequent affections ; that the necessitous state of men without reciprocal assistance ; that the mutual strength and security, which the union of numbers gives to a body of men, and the attracting pleasures of conversation and sociability ; do all severally and unitedly draw men, necessarily, into society?—I looked assent.—Why may we not believe then, continued he, that a small number of men, in a state of pure simplicity, might live amicably together, under the sole influence of the laws of their nature, at least for some time ;
and

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and that small irregularities might be corrected by shame, by fear, and by reproof?——I see no objection, said I.——Greater crimes, added he, from the dread all men would have of their extending to themselves, would naturally excite them to think of the means of prevention: They would, doubtless, congregate, and consult for the general safety; and, in their defence, would form rules, institutes, or civil laws, by the energy of which they might hope to secure themselves from such enormities in future. As crimes increased, so would civil institutes; and so a body politic would be as naturally produced, as any other effect in nature. This I take to be a true, though but a short account of the rise of civil government.——

Though

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Though short, said I, it comprehends much, and seems very probable. But is it not hard to conceive, how, from so simple an origin, so great a diversity of governments could arise?—The difficulty of accounting for so great a diversity, with precision, may be very great, replied he. The impenetrable obscurity in which the origin and earlier times of nations are clouded, are the causes of this difficulty.—But were the histories of nations exact accounts of the progress of a people from their earliest state, upward; and were they written in a circumstantial and philosophical manner; I think, from what we know by our own experience, when we thoroughly understand the motives of mens actions, there is but little reason to doubt, that
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a chain of causes and events would be discovered, which would sufficiently account for all the varieties which have appeared in political governments.

But great and striking actions and events alone are generally the subject of history ; and all the intermediate links, which should chain those great events together, are slightly passed over, or entirely unnoticed. Nay even the motives and causes, which produced the great events themselves, are generally far from being thoroughly understood. And indeed it happens unfortunately for history, that a nation is so complex a body, and every public action is the product of so many and various motives, views, and interests, that the historian must be
very

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very happy in his conjectures, who doth not frequently err in his endeavours to explain them. And for this cause it is, that we find but few histories worth the reading, except those, in which the writers themselves have been considerable actors.—I believe your observations are just, said I, and I am thus far satisfied. But what do you say to an *original compact*, so much talked of by political writers? — I say, answered he, after a short pause, by continuing our enquiries on the same principles, on which we have hitherto proceeded, we shall probably find that subject much less difficult, and more clear, than it is generally found in the usual way of treating it.—I begged he would proceed in his own way; and he began thus.

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Granting

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Granting the existence of a formal or an implied compact (for the existence of both have been denied) in every state, what may one naturally suppose to be the foundation and object of such a compact?—I cannot readily say, answered I.—I should think, said he, the *object* must be general good or happiness ; and, if so, the *foundation* must be on justice.—It seems so, said I.—It cannot otherwise, replied he, be a fair compact : for if the interest and advantage of one, or a few only, be aimed at and obtained, to the oppression of the rest, it is nothing less than deceiving and over-reaching the oppressed party ; and therefore such a compact must be, in its nature, void.—True, said I.—There can then, continued he, be no *just* political compact

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compact made contrary to the true principles of human nature ; because, if the foundation of such compact must be on *justice*, the determinations of *justice* must be regulated by these principles ; as was shewn in our first conversation. Men, from a sense of the excellence of these principles, being moved with a desire of preserving them as pure as possible, first formed civil polities ; not to thwart and contradict, but to confirm and strengthen them. No compact can, therefore, be supposed of any force or validity, which would oblige men, in any manner, not consonant to these principles. And thus we find the just measure of every formal or implied political compact to be the true principles or laws of human nature.—It must be so,

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said I. — To assert then, said he, the validity of any political compact, either formal or implied, to oblige men to submit to laws enacted by any authority whatsoever, any longer than such laws be conformable to, or corroborative of, the true principles of human nature, must be a false assertion, and inimical to the just liberties of mankind. — Your conclusion seems just, said I. Yet, in common life, we do not think a contract void and of no force, on account of its being, on one side, a foolish, or even an injurious bargain. — The generality do not, replied he; yet that they do not think so, does not arise from any conviction that such a contract can possibly be just; but because it is found necessary, to prevent eternal litigations, and end-

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less uncertainty, to draw a line somewhere, that there may be some rule, some standing measure in these matters. Nevertheless, when cases of extraordinary folly or iniquity occur, the obligation of a contract is frequently made void. But the case of a political compact, which comprehends the interests of whole nations ; and in which the natural enjoyments and prosperity of a people and their posterity are concerned ; must be understood in the most liberal sense, utterly devoid of all those mean artifices which are usually employed in what is called *making a good bargain*. For there is a wide difference between private contracts, and this great public one.

But it has been usual, continued he, to view this matter in another

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light, in which it is presumed, that a people can stipulate away the rights and privileges of their nature, in favour of their prince, or rulers. In this view of an original compact, the wisdom of the prince, or of the rulers, will be thought great, in proportion as the compact shall be explained in favour of the establishment of their own power and authority, as a kind of rightful property, which they hold independent of the people.—It is frequently so understood, said I.—So that having usurped an authority, continued he, or acquired it by any other more artful means, the use they would make of a compact seems to be only that of confirming, augmenting, or peradventure of regulating that authority so acquired; but which the people

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people are never supposed to have any right to abolish, even if it should be judged absolutely necessary for the general welfare of the community.—Such doctrines have been advanced, said I.—But surely, said he, to talk of a compact on such a foundation as this, must be esteemed an impudent mockery of the common sense of mankind. We will therefore endeavour farther to explain the nature of this political compact, and to fix it in its *true* point of view.—I begged he would, and he proceeded thus.

When men first began to disregard the impulses or laws of their nature, and their irregularities and vices pointed out the necessity of political institutions; at the commencement of those institutions, the first probable appear-

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ances of a compact are discovered, But here we do not perceive any appearance of a compact between parties, whose rights, interests, or views are distinct or opposite: it is rather a general union or agreement of a society of men, in defence of the rights of human nature. It is an agreement to submit to such institutes, laws, and regulations, as may be deemed adequate to the purposes of reducing men to, and of retaining them in, a proper subjection to the laws of their nature: and the obligations of this agreement, to be just, must be equal on every member of the society. Will the advocates for unjust authority, interrogated he, be able to derive much advantage from a compact of this sort?

—Not much, answered I.

But,

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But, continued he, it has been affirmed, that when men enter into a political society, they make a formal, or a tacit, surrender of their natural rights to that society ; and, as it were, compact or agree so to do. The drift and tendency of this affirmation is to establish the authority of all ruling powers, just or unjust, and to debase and enslave mankind. But no maxim was ever more false, or less founded in nature. Men neither do, nor can mean, by entering into government, to give up any of their essential natural rights : they mean, by the aid of government, to maintain and secure them. They do not mean to subjugate themselves to the will of tyrannical masters, nor even to political laws, when dissonant and repugnant
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to the principles of their nature. Their intention, as well as the true end of government, is quite the contrary. For, if men had paid a punctual obedience to the laws of their nature, the instituting of civil laws, and consequently of civil magistrates, would have been quite unnecessary. Civil laws were instituted to enforce obedience to the true laws of human nature. Therefore civil laws, which contradict or are repugnant to the true laws of human nature, are not *in conscience* binding. And all civil laws, and all civil magistracies, ought to be formed, altered and corrected, confirmed or abolished, according as they agree with, or are repugnant to, the true laws of human nature.

But were we to grant, that under
government

government (through the defectiveness of human policy) some of our natural rights must necessarily be waved, in compliance with a general opinion of its being advantageous to the community at large; it must also be allowed, at the same time, that, in justice, no part of the rights of nature should be given up by any one, which ought not to be given up by every member of the same community. The *just equality* of mankind demands so much. But what are the principal natural rights, supposed to be given up in civil society? Are they not the rights of *judging in our own cause, and of avenging our own injuries?*——They are, said I.——And these, continued he, we surrender to the state, to be placed in the hands of
proper

proper magistrates. But if we consider the tendencies of these rights, as they are called, they will be found so very injurious and unjust, and so inimical to humanity, that it will be hard to allow them the appellation of *natural rights* at all. They are powers necessarily assumed and exercised, when the condition of mankind proves so miserable, as to have no better way of administering justice. But they are so evidently wrong, so clearly subversive of justice, that no man in his senses would attempt to justify the use of them, *as rights*, but in cases of irresistible necessity. — Here he paused. — I assented. — Well then, said he, should it be still insisted on, that men, on entering into government, do agree to surrender up part
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(or the whole, as some blindly contend) of their natural rights; let it never be forgotten, that such agreement cannot be obligatory on any one, unless it extend to every one, under the same government. But let us, said he, digress no farther, but pursue our subject a little more closely.

I think we had found the first appearance of a compact to be at the commencement of civil society; and that the compact then was, not between parties, whose interests were opposite or essentially different, but were one and the same, and united and centered in one point, which was, *the defence of their natural rights.*—We had, said I.—To proceed then, said he.

When such civil laws, as may be judged adequate to such defence, are
agreed

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agreed on ; the manner of putting them into execution becomes the next object of consideration, and produces *another sort of compact*, which is entirely relative to the execution. And hence originate all the various powers and authorities of magistracy. Let us examine the true nature of the compact in this place, which does indeed not only contain what has generally been understood by a political compact, but it comprehends all that is most important to civil liberty.—I desired him to go on.

The laws then, continued he, being agreed on, a mode of executing them must necessarily be determined on ; and the various powers of magistracy are found requisite for that purpose. We will therefore suppose them to be ordained and established, and their
several

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several powers exercised and enforced.
——Very well, said I.—— Now what, demanded he, must we understand the compact to have been, between the people and the magistrates, in this case? Could it be, that the people surrendered themselves to be governed at the discretion of the magistrates; or were the magistrates chosen simply to execute the determinations of the people?——Undoubtedly the latter, answered I.——It must be so, replied he, for the power of magistracy in itself is nothing; that force, which arises from the general concurrence and consent of the people, is absolutely necessary to give it stability. The people, therefore, compact or agree to exert that force (which is always ultimately supreme) in support

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of the power of their magistrates : And the magistrates agree to exercise their power, in the modes prescribed, and for the ends proposed by the people. And this seems to me to be the only just and natural purpose of such a compact. — So it appears to me, said I.

But, continued he, (*humanum est errare*) magistrates long habituated to power not sufficiently controuled, are apt to claim such power as their right : And a people long habituated to obedience, without frequent exertions of their supremacy, by new delegations of power, are apt to forget their own rights. These bad habits, however, cannot annihilate the just rights of mankind. They only discover to us, that frequent assertions of them are
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very necessary; and that the memories of both magistrates and people want perpetual refreshing on those important points.

The compact then, as explained above, does not give the magistrates any power independent of the people, or independent of the ends proposed by the people to be accomplished by that power. It does not fix them as lords and masters of the people; it only constitutes them executors of the laws or determinations of the people, to which they, with the whole community, are equally subject. Peculiar privileges often claimed by, and sometimes thought necessary to magistracy, are hardly ever justifiable, and never at all but temporarily.

The people, therefore, always retain

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in themselves, as an inherent and unalienable property, the right of delegating power to their magistrates, and consequently the right of prescribing the particular modes of exercising such power, and also of recalling that power whenever it may be found necessary so to do ; that is, whenever it shall be exercised contrary to the ends proposed, or even when it shall have been exercised strictly according to the ends proposed, and proves not adequate, or not satisfactory. For every political institution ought to be considered only as making an experiment ; and its permanency ought to depend intirely on its efficiency or non-efficiency for the purposes intended, and not at all on the meritorious conduct of the executive instrument, the magistrate. So
that

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that in this view of a compact, we do not see the least appearance of a surrender of their natural rights by the people, nor any just foundation for a retention of their authority by the magistrates, against the consent of the people. The compact, strictly speaking, on the part of the people extends only to the intrusting of the magistrates with certain portions of power, which are to be exercised in certain modes, with a view to attain ends which may be deemed beneficial to the community at large, and to support the magistrates in the execution : and the magistrates, on their part, are bound to observe the modes, and to pursue the ends, truly and faithfully.

But, interrogated I, suppose they do not observe the modes and pursue the

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ends truly?—If they do not, answered he, they break the compact, and consequently forfeit their authority; may be justly displaced by the people, and their power so disposed of as may be thought most advantageous to the community.—But what if they do observe the compact *strictly*? demanded I.—If they do, replied he, although they will then do no more than was agreed on, nor than they ought as a duty; yet strict integrity being a very estimable quality, they will deserve all the rewards and all the honours due to so meritorious a conduct.—Perhaps, said I, smiling, you may think it enough to have *deserved well* of the republic. But I hope you will acknowledge, that, as long as the magistrates shall *strictly* observe the compact,

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compact, they will have *some* right to retain and exercise the powers delegated to them, especially if the powers be such as are deemed permanent in the state?—By no means, replied he. As long as they observe the compact, (although the powers they exercise be deemed permanent in the state) the only just conclusion we can draw is, that they exercise their power legally, and according to the intent for which it was delegated to them: but that cannot give them the least claim to a right to a perpetual exercise of that power, independent of the people, from whom it was received, and from whom alone all just power is derived. In short, continued he, somewhat enthusiastically, the just rights of human nature, founded on the divine princi-

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ples, which the all-wise Creator hath originally impressed on the human species, are utterly unalienable *by any means whatsoever!* No rights of princes, no powers of magistracy, no force of laws, no delusive compacts, grants, or charters, can ever entitle any part of mankind to deprive their fellow-creatures of these natural rights! All the nations upon earth (those in the most slavish, as well as those in the most free state) possess an innate, inherent, and indisputable right, to assert their *liberty* at all times! Nor can any thing be more glorious than the attempt, founded on just principles, even if it fail: for then we shall feel the sublime satisfaction of being actuated by those divine principles, which, from their native truth
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and beauty, as well as from our inward sense of them, we know to be the laws of God!——Thus ended our second dialogue.

D I A L O G U E III.

THE succeeding evening, we renewed our subject; and after making some cursory observations on what had been said before, May I now request your opinion on a very grave subject, said I, the subject of religion; I mean, so far, at least, as *liberty* may appear to be concerned in it? I know very well, you think on that, as well as on other subjects of less serious import, with great freedom: but I desire nothing so much, as that you will express yourself with your usual frankness and sincerity; because we can by no other means come to a true under-

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understanding of any subject.—I will, replied he, endeavour to satisfy you in the way you desire, but *generally*, and without entering into too many particulars, on a subject so delicate.—What, then, continued he, must we call that general apprehension of superior beings, or of *One Supreme*, which seems so naturally, and so universally, to possess the minds of all men? Must we not, in a general sense, call it religion? interrogated he.—To be sure, said I.—And, replied he, it appears so like an innate principle, that it will be found hard to imagine it to be any thing less. However, it being unnecessary to our present purpose to endeavour to prove it to be so, we will, at this time, pass it by; only we may observe from it, with

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with what prodigious facility and ease men receive religious impressions of various and even opposite kinds : with so much facility, and so necessary does religion seem to the *mind* of man, that *it* cannot rest without possessing itself of such notions of the religious kind (whether justly and rationally founded or not) as may happily prove, in some degree, satisfactory to itself. Neither do I think it necessary here to enter into any dispute concerning what religion may be fortunate enough to be the only true one ; our present business being only to discover, if we can, in what manner religion may be rendered most favourable to the just liberties of mankind.—Were I inclined to libertine-wit, said I, I might answer you, Not in any manner at all.

But

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But I only impertinently interrupt you.—Not at all, replied he; for I am not quite certain that there may not be some truth in the observation; at least, if we were to be governed by our past experience of all religions, when not properly controuled by the civil power.

There is in religions (or perhaps more properly, in religionists) of every denomination, something *naturally* intolerant and tyrannical, whenever there is any great degree of sincerity and zeal in the worshipper: And perhaps it may be an incontestable truth, that the more erroneous and false his notions be, the stronger will these dispositions be, in him. And there is nothing in all this but what is very natural, and even in some cases almost meritorious,

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meritorious, when we consider the intention, and not the consequences. For, there is such a natural charm and beauty in truth, that even false images of it, when believed to be the true, warmly engage the affections: and even in very uninteresting and insignificant things, where the mind finds itself thoroughly, though perhaps falsely, convinced, (and men act freely and devoid of that caution, which polite or crafty men possess) it cannot resist its propensity to zeal; which is generally accompanied with an obstinate and positive humour, which carries the same marks of tyranny and intolerance. Now religious truths, or what are believed to be religious truths, being of a much more important nature than any other; the zeal, the intolerance,

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ance, and the tyranny in their behalf, must naturally be stronger, and consequently much more troublesome and dangerous to the just liberty of mankind.

It proves indeed unfortunate for mankind, that what are generally thought the most important truths of religion, are either hidden in impenetrable mysteries, or are absolutely beyond the reach of the human understanding and nature; so that it is impossible for men to be convinced of their truth, by any sound philosophical reasoning. And doubtless on this account it is, among others, that *faith* hath ever been esteemed so very meritorious in all religions; for it saves a world of pains to the worthy tribe of zealous profelyte-makers. — And

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here you perceive, continued he, that the sublimer truths of religion, are of a kind very different from all other truths. For in other truths, the reasonings and evidences are founded in nature, and lie level to the senses, understanding, and capacity of man ; so that it is generally not very difficult to prove, or disprove any *interesting truth or falsehood*. And if it should happen, that some good men (which has, very frequently, been the case) should be troubled with chimerical and unphilosophical whimsies ; which they may zealously endeavour to propagate for truths, there cannot well arise much harm from it ; because, as no opinions are deemed sacred but religious ones, such whimsies will either fall into the neglect or contempt they may ill-fatedly

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fatedly deserve ; or every one will be at liberty to ridicule or refute them.— But the mysterious truths of religion are not to be treated in this ordinary and familiar manner. Their defenders have, by faith, which is always much superior to argument, so strong a *sense* of their sublimity ; and they attach such very important and interesting consequences, to a right, or a wrong conception and belief of them ; that, when in earnest, they cannot chuse but feel themselves extraordinarily zealous and strenuous in their propagation and defence.

It were undoubtedly vain, and perhaps foolish, to think of treating men thus enlightened, in the ordinary way of argumentation. The just and necessary cautions, which prudent men
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are apt to use on other subjects, are branded with opprobrious names, and perhaps themselves too; and wit and ridicule, those cruel enemies to grave imposture, are held in utter detestation and abhorrence. And perhaps indeed we ought to treat with some degree of respect and tenderness, so great and serious, and so universal an infirmity of human nature, even when the falsity and absurdity of their notions are indisputable.

Now, if this account of religion and its effects, when seriously and zealously embraced, be true; (and I trust, past experience, and the very nature of the thing when impartially considered, will abundantly evince the truth of it) can we reasonably conclude, that religion, in the general sense of the word, is naturally

turally *favourable* to the just liberties of mankind?—I should think not, answered I.—Is it not strongly inimical, interrogated he again?—Why, it seems so, replied I. And you may be right with regard to religion in general; but I hope you make a difference in religions, in that respect; for they certainly are not all equally so.—The thing, answered he, is too evident to be disputed; there are doubtless great differences in their natures and tendencies. But if some be much more moderate than others, we must not forget to attribute a great deal of that moderation to the degree of their subordination to the civil authority. And here I cannot but observe, that, without that subordination, experience hath taught us,

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that there would be no trusting to the moderation of any set of religionists, how mild soever the religion they might profess. — But, said I, the fault would not then be in the religion, but in its professors. — It might be so, he replied; but that, in a political view, makes no difference. Politically, our business is with men and their actions; and if, professing a religion the most pure and innocent, they either so misconceive or misapply its precepts and doctrines, as to become turbulent and refractory intruders on the just liberties of mankind, it must surely be as reasonable and necessary to keep them in a due subordination, as any other disturbers of the public peace, and invaders of the public liberty.

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—Do you then, demanded I, allow nothing to the divine authority by which they act, at least in the true religion? — A well-governed state, answered he, will allow of no authority, among men within its own jurisdiction, superior to itself. Indeed, a government founded on the just principles we have described in our preceding discourses, will act by a divine authority, to which nothing can be superior on earth. But men may be allowed the liberty of pretending to what they please, so long as they restrain themselves from encroaching on the natural freedom of mankind. But when they will not do that, where is the fault of making them understand that they must? — Why truly, said I, I cannot very readily tell you :

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but yet methinks your doctrine makes somewhat too free with so serious a subject.—What, when the object is *liberty*? interrogated he.—To be sure, answered I; for have not you (in our first conversation) taught me, that liberty should be restrained within certain bounds? — True, true, replied he: and within those bounds I am contented to be restrained. But I cannot allow our religionists more liberty than I do myself, notwithstanding their divine pretensions.

But this restraint cannot naturally extend to the thoughts: and speech may be exercised very freely, without any dangerous consequences to liberty: and I should think it could never be deemed injurious to the just pretensions of any set of religionists;
if

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if they were kind enough to allow the same freedom of thought and of speech to others, which they are generally disposed to exercise so liberally themselves. Freedom of thought, in respect of the rights of humanity, is perfectly innocent : and freedom of speech, when employed in the search of truth, is not only beneficial, but it is absolutely necessary, and *equally* the right of all men. What advantage the free exercise of this right hath been of, towards the discovery of many truths in polite literature, is pretty well known ; nor has it indeed thrown a little light on religious subjects, although under much restraint, even in the freest countries.

But would you then, said I, take off all restraint in matters of religion ? I

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ask this question, because that freedom of speech for which you contend, if exercised on religious subjects, would evidently have such a tendency.

—Undoubtedly, answered he; for I know of no just restraint which can be laid on that freedom, but that which ought to restrain men (as we have agreed) in all other cases; I mean *respect for the just rights of human nature*. And besides, men have not a clearer right in nature, than that of paying their devotions to their God in their own manner.

Such freedom, continued he, might be productive of still greater diversity in the modes of worship than are now practised. But how very favorable that diversity has ever been to liberty, by blunting the edge of that
cruel

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cruel zeal which admits of but one true mode, is known from dear-bought experience : and the causes not being very difficult to understand, it is surprizing how men could ever be so wrought on, as to think otherwise.

Do we not see the infinite diversity of men's thoughts and opinions on subjects which are generally thought by no means difficult to understand ? And whence doth this arise, but from causes which can never be intirely removed ? The different degrees of the understandings of men, of the strength or weakness of their affections and passions, of their application to the proper means of information and correction, their jarring interests, and a thousand other various and opposite

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circumstances, as in other things, so in religion, create differences in the ideas of human minds, as utterly irreconcilable to each other as the most contrary things in nature. This being the case, what can be expected from the endeavours of those who blindly strive to reduce men to an uniformity of opinions and modes in religion? Can there be any thing more tyrannical than the latter, or more impossible in nature than the former?——He paused.——I looked assent.——Commend me, rather than to such vile tyranny, continued he, to the generous and liberal Pagans, under whose free constitutions every man might choose a religion for himself, and among whom the gods of all countries were admitted, and even
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courted to come : for such a free tolerance is certainly much more favourable to our just liberties, than any forced uniformity of worship, even of the most true religion, can be. Besides, I do not conceive, that were uniformity established, and that in a mode which may be thought the most pure imaginable, that *mental idolatry*, which is the most faulty part of idolatry, would be at all cured by such uniformity. It never can be cured, for those very causes of the diversity of men's ideas, which have been enumerated above.

It has been thought no mean stretch of the human understanding, to form *tolerably* just ideas of the sublime perfections of the Deity : and it falls not to the lot of many men, to be *nearly consistent*

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consistent on a subject so dazzling, so immense ! Perfect clearness is, doubtless, much beyond the utmost capacity of the most enlarged human mind. If the wisest and ablest then be incapable of attaining notions truly worthy of the Supreme Being ; what must we say of that rude and incongruous mixture, which possesses and agitates the minds of the mass of mankind, clouded as they are with all the various and numerous obstructions to a just apprehension ? — Indeed I know not, said I ; unless that their ideas must be very unworthy of the Supreme Being. But what do you conclude from that ? — I conclude, answered he, that, be the modes of worship what they may, the ideas of the Deity, in the minds of vulgar worshippers

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shippers in general, are, and ever will be, false, erroneous, and idolatrous; and that the case can never be otherwise, as long as men form their ideas of the attributes and perfections of the Deity, from unjust and ill-founded fears, and senseless hopes; and from all the variable and fluctuating passions and affections with which they feel themselves agitated.—That is, in short, said I, as long as men shall be men.—True, it is so, replied he; and for that very reason, I also conclude, that it is tyranny to attempt to force men to practise any particular modes of worship, though perfectly right and true; and that they ought to be left free to exercise themselves in the religious way, so as may be most suitable to their own capacities and will;

will ; provided only, that they offend not against the just laws of human nature.

Supposing, said I, all you have said to be true ; yet you seem to me to carry your love of religious liberty, much farther than would be found advantageous to civil liberty.—If so, replied he, I must be wrong.—For I have always understood, continued I, that religion, under the direction of a wise government, might be employed very usefully, as well to strengthen the bonds of civil society, as to confirm the morals of men. And certainly its influence would be much more strong and equal, where uniformity prevailed, than where there was an unbounded diversity ; or it would be strong or weak in proportion to the uniformity, or diversity, of the modes of worship.

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—I think, replied he, I have nowhere said any thing contrary to your first observation; if I have, I here retract it.—But as to your last, experience has demonstrated your mistake. Not but that what you advance might be true, if an uniformity could be obtained freely, and founded on a thorough conviction of the minds of men. But as that can never be, for the causes which have been already assigned above, I think your observation cannot be supported.

A conviction of the mind is absolutely necessary in all cases, in which we would engage the heart. Were men, on such a conviction, without force, to run into an useful uniformity; perhaps it would be a very desirable thing. Yet I cannot but doubt of it, because God (certainly for wise ends)

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ends) seems to have constituted the nature of man in opposition to it.—

However they are much more likely to be so disposed, after having had time to canvas and examine things in their own way freely, than by any effort of power whatsoever. And I must again repeat, that it is a cruel tyranny to attempt to force men in matters of religion, as long as their conduct remain inoffensive to the rights of humanity.

But we do not find, by experience; that diversity in religion hath any natural tendency to weaken the force of states; even although that diversity be extravagant and monstrous, as it is represented to have been among the Pagans. We do not find any material divisions among the Greeks or Romans, on religious accounts; nor that
state

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state affairs were carried on less successfully, on account of the great number of their gods and goddeses. Nor do we find in our own country, that toleration, as far as it extends, has at all weakened our strength as a nation. Nay we are sure of the contrary.—I know of but one reason therefore, for refusing toleration to any religion, and that is, when we are certain its principles and professors are intolerant themselves. Such was, formerly, the temper of the Jews, and such still is the temper of some religionists, even in these enlightened days.

I will only add, in favour of religious liberty, that an extensive diversity has some great and undeniable advantages over a forced uniformity, or a very limited toleration.—In a great diversity, men find very little difficulty

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of unloading their minds of their burthens of superstition in their own way ; and this facility must naturally prove a great cooler of religious zeal, which is always more heated by difficulty and opposition. And where a man finds a thousand different modes of worship already formed and established, and a thousand different arguments in favour of each mode ; his eagerness to embrace any one, must be very much retarded, and a proper moderation and coolness will, most probably, be the result of his delay : an effect the most favourable imaginable to religious liberty, and a preparation indispensably necessary to the clear comprehension of abstruse and difficult truths.— Here he paused, seeming to expect a reply.

I do not find myself, said I, much disposed to controvert the general tendency

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dency of your reasoning ; yet I cannot allow myself so much freedom of thought on this subject, as to believe it would be beneficial to mankind, to allow so extensive a liberty in religious matters, as you contend for. You seem desirous of regulating the operations and modes of religion (as well as those of civil Laws) *by the principles or laws of human nature* ; which appears to me an inversion of the natural order of things : for certainly religion must be prior in dignity, and given unto mankind to regulate and supply the defects of the laws of nature, and not to be controuled and regulated by those laws.—I shall not dispute the priority in dignity with you, replied he ; it has been too long assumed by priestly modesty. But if I mistake not, a very essential part of the duties of religion

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